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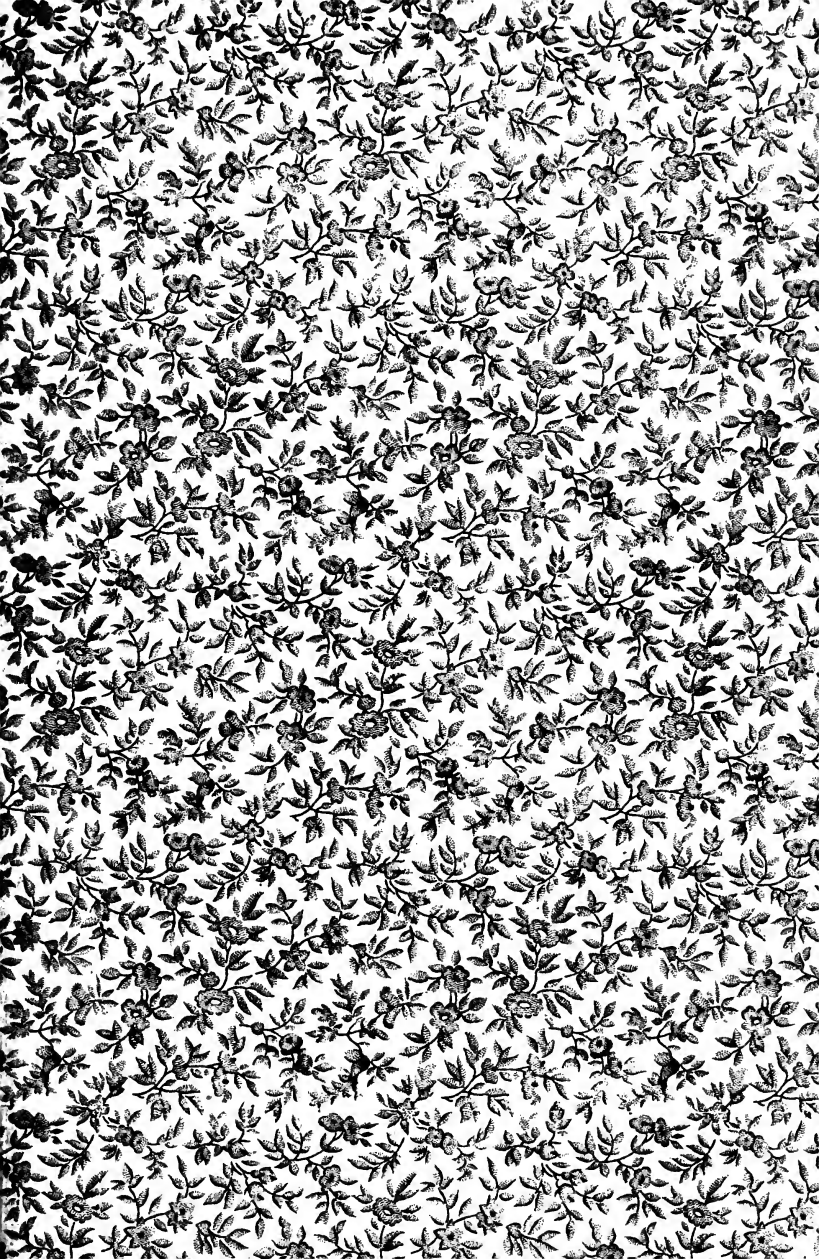

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THROUGH BROKEN REEDS

Verses

BY

WILL AMOS RICE

"Mere breath of passing air, mere hollow tones
That idle winds to broken reeds impart."
— E. R. SILL.

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BOSTON
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To Whom it May Concern.

O DREAD monarchs, on whose rocky coast
My little boat has grounded, — let me stay!
Hold thy poised weapon: I'm but a wandering ghost
Who thought it harmless to pause upon the way.

Lift me ashore and see my eyes dilate!
Tho' weak from travel, feel that strength will grow,
Too far from home, I'm sorry to relate,
My little craft has floated to and fro.

But since I'm here, please try to use me well,
And I 'll repay you — sometime — somewhere;
Perhaps as Druids pay, yet this I cannot tell, —
I only know I've laid my feelings bare.

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THROUGH BROKEN REEDS.

THROUGH BROKEN REEDS.

A PLEA.

I.

I HARDLY dare to make the run,
The goal in sight seems all too small;
Yet better should I venture all,
Than never to have ventured none?

Well, I have made a stroke at last;
(A feeble one, I see it now,
Still, in each sentence is a vow
That in the foundry of the soul was cast.)

This world is full of sad mistakes;
And though it's but a tale oft told,
It never stales nor waxes old,
But like the loves a freshness makes.

Thus if a gleam in all of this
Should chance to wake one thrill of joy,
Perhaps, in kindness, the alloy
You'll cast a-down some precipice.

II.

I have not sinned because I thought
In sinning could a joy be found;
Yet brighter seems each grassy mound,—
From farther still the gems seem brought.

He who counts but one day's bliss,
And harvests all his sheaves for that,
Had better seek the darkest vat
Which has its birth in love's first kiss.

I count them all in every season,
  The blackest clouds expel them not:
  The vilest tongues can never rot
The diamonds of a thoughtful reason.

III.

Now to the markets of the world,
  Uncovered, that the light may show
  The good and bad, my wares I throw,
And leave them, — one more flag unfurled, —

Unfurled before the people's gaze, —
  Or, rather, those who care to look, —
  I send this message and the book
To idle out the laggard days.

IV.

If idleness be but an art,
  And living it the height of sin,
  I hope the praises I may win,
Will come from those who have a heart.

I will not storm the walls of Fame,
For, storming in a peaceful time
Would range the furies 'gainst my rhyme,
And to my country be a shame.

But if a thoughtful word will gain
Admission to their parapets,
I'll lowly kneel; and no regrets
I'll offer for the welcome rain.

And neither do I wish your gold—
Except enough for present needs:
He is a leech who others bleeds,
Rhyming when his heart is cold.

Some sing for money and the power
That comes with fame to ease the life;
I place my very soul in strife,
And earn my *living* without dower!

Yet in my heart a passion burns;
I soar above the common herd,
Perhaps a heavy, small-winged bird,
That fathoms not its unknown yearns.

But if the ocean's depths were known,
And line and lead had rested there,
What need of all the wear and tear
To fathom its deep-calling moan?

v.

I sometimes see as oft I gaze,
Those circling flights that I would take,
Where all the circles of my wake,
Seem melting into brighter days.

But this is fancy's burning fire;
Beyond the earth and in the skies,
I hardly dare to raise my eyes,
Lest I should meet a harmful ire.

I trust to thee, each critic friend,
My all in life, — what I have done;
My morning only has begun,—
At morning should my passion end?

Whate'er thy verdict chance to be,
  Whate'er of merit in my song,
  Within my heart will echo long
The music-strings of melody.

VI.

Oft in the darkness of my woe,
  When hope has but the veriest gleam,
  The flood-gates of Desire's stream
Are closed when help to me might flow.

But fate has changes all too deep,
  Too mystic for the eye to read,
  And listens not to hearts that plead
On bended knee, or those that weep.

My fate has been a wandering strain,
  Icarian bird of blackest hue,
  And, through the darkest midnights, flew
As swallows when they presage rain.

And what I offer is so small
A part of what I *feel* and *think*,
That oft mid glooms my spirits sink
Because I cannot paint it all,—

Because I cannot tell my dreams
In words that hold the truth and light;
For all my life I've walked in night,
And caught to heart but mirror gleams.

Pleading and weeping all in vain,
No guide the rugged path hath shown;
No bright divining rod I own,
Only the thorns that giveth pain.

So, if my lyre notes are weak,
And seem but random forms of speech,
Loan me the strong arms of thy reach,
And point the path I fain would seek.

VII.

When Autumn touches all around,
(Believe me what I say is truth),

The tinted flush of Winter's youth,
Dwells in my heart, — a music sound.

Within each golden leavèd dell,
Where threads a silvery stream or two,
With all that's fair my spirits flew,
And dreamed that life was good and well.

Upon the hill, deep in the dale,
Across the circling mead and moor,
Along the ocean's sanded shore,
Where lightenings flash amid the gale,

The plain, the mountain topped with snow,
Amid the wind, and in the sea,
A Presence ever speaks to me,
And beckons where I fain would go.

Chained are my feet; no wings have I;
I am a thing of earth and clay,
Who marvels at the dawning day,
And wonders what it is to die.

I wake to all the under-tow
That surges in a mighty throng;
The mixture of the good and wrong,
That all the breaths of scandal blow.

I claim this much; *I see it all.*
But ah, sad fate! I cannot tell,
Though in my heart the language dwell,
There's scarce an echo to my call.

VIII.

Along those shores that breathe of peace,
Where rivers greet the sunny sand,
And joy spreads far on every hand,
I fain would walk and find release,—

Release that comes with perfect bliss,
To stay through nights of darkest gloom,
(That are but pressings from the tomb,
And leave their world to darken this);—

Release that wears not sorrow's crown,
  However bright the crown may be,
  Nor has an idle constancy,
That holds beneath the gilt a frown.

But let my wandering footsteps glide
  Along those shores that hold the light
  That never darkens when the night
Has spread her wings o'er land and tide.

Let all the press of worldly care
  Take wing and whirl away from me;
  And let the mountains of the sea
In cunning guise its wings ensnare.

Along the pebbly ocean shore,
  Where laughing ripples hold their play
  With whirling sea-gulls all the day,
Let my slow footsteps trespass o'er,

And let the future be a calm
  With all the storms left far behind,
  Where all the musings of the mind,
Slip tenderly, as psalm to psalm.

IX.

When all the nights are clasped by June,
  And all the stars do scintillate,
  And everything has perfect state,
And when my lyre has found a tune,—

When over all the land is spread
  The subtle perfume of the flowers,
  And happy in their hidden bowers
The chirping birds with night are wed;

When everything has sought repose,
  And only breezes are awake
  To guide the fancy for the sake
Of what from fancy ever flows;

Then, somehow, doth my soul arise
  To thought within its house of clay,
  And wish to know that far away
Beyond the limit of the eyes.

When all the nights are overcast,
  And but the lightning's widening gleam

Across the darkened heavens stream,
And brings the day with silent blast, —

When all the wide expanse of seas
In mad endeavors vainly leap
Far up each stationary steep;
And when the wind sweeps o'er the leas, —

Then, even 'mid the wildest glare
Of earth and heaven, comes to me
The sweet voice of my melody,
And maddest storm is calm and fair.

X.

O dreaming soul! whose unlit lamp,
Swings midway 'twixt the end and now,
What hope is cherished in thy vow?
What tear-drops fall that are not damp?

Were all the wisdom of the world
Piled heavenward in a flaming tower,
Could it reveal the hidden hour
That in this clay this life unfurled?

That flamed this little span of thought,
  That breathed in motion, joy and pain,
  And at the end to come again,
And ask for all that it hath wrought?

And we must grant it; for no power to stay
  The changing, changeless form of death
  Is vested in the mortal breath,
Is held within our form of clay.

We give it to thee; we have sung
  The little song that birthed with us;
  Thy coming, too, was ordained thus,
Yet wasted are the roses flung?

XI.

Along the up-hill aisles of fame,
  The roses are the thorns that prick
  The tender fibers of the quick;
Yet for the worthy food for flame.

I'd count it joy to know the mask
  That hid me had a thousand bands,
  And needed all the iron hands
Of time and patience for the task.

I feel it deepest when I pause,
  As toilers resting from their toil
  Of fear and doubt, and know their soil
Is yielding, and they voice applause.

I feel it in each daily change,
  I know the truth is at the core,
  I cannot ask for any more,
Or lend my fancy wider range.

THE COURIER.

TO the Court of the Soul comes a memory from out of the mist,
Thought's courier, clad in years past that were burned in years past, yet waits to be kissed.
Are his lips not red with the heat of the flame?
Canst thou not see in the ashes the trace of a name?

The Gates of the Soul open wide;
He comes and enters within,
A weakling, half-fledged, and would ride
High up from the altars of sin.
Hark! he pleads; hearest not his low tone at thy side?
Wilt thou not let him abide?
Can his pleadings not win?
Can the pout on his lips be mistaken for aught but the plead for a kiss?
Do you shun him? deny him his measure of bliss?

See! he frowns, you have slain by a look what the dagger of steel could not slay!
He has turned to a demon, high-horsed, and he seeks you as prey!

From the Gates of the Soul he rides out!
He has left in his wake the wrecked mansion of thought.
As he rides, he turns, and flings back a flout,
And he taunts with a cry from the imps of Hades caught.

THE SONG OF DEATH.

IN this next room she is, sir. The door?
Oh! pass through here, step lightly, though, the floor
Is squeaky, and she sleeps.
No, she won't wake, an angel keeps
Close guard; but it's best to show
Due reverence. I could not go
Where my worst enemy was laid
Without half feeling that to thus invade
Death's precincts, were irreverent.
Folly? Perhaps so; yet who lent
The stillness? It is sacred then.

That was her laugh you heard. When?
Why Tuesday week; you know you spoke of it.
I wonder it could flit
So soon from you; I mean
The recollection. See, there she is, — between

Those posts; poor soul! The robe? Oh, yes!
Marks sent her that, I guess.
Don't know him? Pretty, isn't it?
He plays at George's. Yes, a splendid fit;
He knew her measure. Color? almost perfect. Now
You paint in color? Indeed! I vow!
I thought you merely wished to look
In, out of sheer curiosity of this old nook.
So *that's* your purpose; I think she'd keep three days'
Sir.
Ecking was here and gave me to infer,
That he would come, but left no hold.
So if you wish the preference, sir, I'll make bold
(For a mere trifle), to keep it for you.
A fine picture, this! the sunlight working through
To that off-side will help the plan somewhat.
Too many painters follow in the same old rut.
I'm glad there's one to lead a difference,
Some artists really are so dense.
Your easel might stand there; that view
Would take in all worth seeing. You knew
Who shot her? No? That's queer!
Since many a time I've noted both you here;

She was at George's too. Some light-headed fool,
His heart wrapped up in fancies fresh from school,
(So runs the story) was enamored at first sight.
Neither do I, sir, but he *was* blamed. He had a right,
Of course, to love, but not to kill.
Almost perfect, think you? You have skill
If you can reproduce the mould
Of that forearm and hand. I'm told
They're solid, sir, — nearly a pound, I think;
That is, the two. Some would not pause to wink;
I keep close guard of them for fear
A thief might enter. It would cost him dear
Should I catch him at it. They were given her
By Paulis, the baritone. So I should say, sir;
Her wrists do seem most too frail to bear
Such heavy weights as constant wear;
Yet she's worn them from the moment they were pressed
Upon her; for his sake, I should say. It expressed
How deep her feelings played. At least, that's how
We ought interpret it, and disallow
All other claims. I said,
A fool, I may be wrong; too soon at times we wed
Our thoughts to loud expression. He
And Paulis both were there; by that, no doubt, you'll see

They both had hopes, perhaps. Yet I would say
She never lured them by false play.

They both threw flowers at the song's close;
She bowed and smiled as one who knows
A welcome is forthcoming. Then she stooped
To pick the roses. Those bright locks looped
In ringlets of pale gold about her brow.
(You see how close the semblance is to my words *now*.)

Paulis' she reached first, and then upthrew
Her fine eyes' glance that shot one through and through.
There was a hushed moment. Man, *I* saw it all!
The upraised arm, the polished steel, the flash, the fall,
Poor fool! he never knew his end, I ween,
Nor how the rope came round his neck; between
You and me, my dear sir, I want my days to close
More peaceful, Heaven knows!

It's the way you came, my friend,
Looks different, though, because you send
Your thoughts back to the way you entered.
I suppose, sir, your thoughts are centered

On the picture-planning in advance,
The scheme of color. Yes, Murray. By chance?
No? Seen him perhaps? Well
It's a good likeness and finely drawn. I don't buy to sell.
I hung it there for show. Pictures I admire
When they're *good;* of poor ones I soon tire.
Well, success. At ten, then, I'll be here.

. . . . . .

Poor soul! alone upon her silent bier.

THE PURPLE HILL.

A HUNDRED tender notes were whirled
Invisible through misty dells;
False Echo, dreaming, deftly hurled
Them back in undulating, vagrant swells.
One voice, long silent, found an answering mate,
Robed in the purple of the night's estate.

But was it voice or echo that I heard
Soft melting o'er the twilit hills,
Or but the rhyme of hidden rills,
That vaguely half-lost memories stirred?
Or was it, — could it be some bird
Half smothered in its own sweet trills?

Voice, echo, bird or wandering rill
  That brought lost memory from the sable Past,
  Come! take thou this heart and hold it fast,
And with thy warmth subdue its chill;
  And with thy presence ever cast
A halo round the purple hill.

EVENTIDE.

HARK! o'er the meadow the cattle's soft low;
So gently it cometh, and slow,—
Slow like the soft tread of years
Which falleth and resteth as snow.

Hark! it's the murmur of bells,
Floating 'mid daylight and dark;
Faintly they tinkle and mark
The approach o'er the fells.

Now Night her pinions spreads, and shade
Shroudeth the world in glooms!
All things grow unfamiliar, dim, then fade,
While but the last, faint blooms
Of dying day the west invade.

Now a deep splash, and then
All is still; across the fen
A half-breathed low, as a mournful sigh
Of winds adown the the glen.

MY LADY.

MY lady, I saw you start and catch your breath,
Within the door-way's dark recess.
I doubt not that of me you saith,
"There's one who favored my caress!"

My lady, a new one at thy bidding's come
To praise you, hold you in his arms,
As I have held you, — almost dumb,
And dazzled by your winsome charms.

My lady, no need was there to turn and flee,
For my great love hath had its day.
(I mean the love that pulsed for thee
Hath pulsed to flame and burned away).

My lady, I now could hold that hand of thine,
And watch a smile part those red lips,

And not one fiber of my heart would pine
To have me kiss their pouting tips.

My lady, I fear that you have wrought a stain
That your tears' flood can never wash away;
I dare not think how many hearts you've slain,
Nor what great hopes to you have fallen prey.

My lady, I saw you, noticed the quick look,
Beseeching like, that fell from your gray eyes.
I laughed; I half feared then that you mistook
My meaning, yours was of such surprise.

My lady, my smile was spawned of deepest scorn,
(Believe and trust me as you always did
When in thy presence I have felt new-born,
And never tarried when I learned thy bid).

My lady, in one short year how old you've grown.
Had I not seen it I had spurned the truth;
All save thy lips' red tinge hath flown:
Thou art, my lady, agéd in thy youth.

A SONG TO THE CENTRAL GRACE.

AT dawn thy wings are bathed anew
With clear-spun colors of the day
And chasings of the lingering dew
Where lights reflect; God's diamonds slew
The rainbow colors for their prey.

Up-soaring through the light apace,
Thy bosom heaves with dreams that surge;
And Joy's supernal roses bathe thy face,
While dimpling smiles each other chase,
And into heaven's gladness merge.

O hope, thy missions never end!
'Tis joy to thee to link each cry and thought,
Or bending, touch the tender point, or send
Thy presence when thou seemest dead, and mend
Again the soul with longings fraught.

Each song that wings through meadows' sweep,
  Or roams far off on purple mountains high,
Each flower that to the sun doth leap
And breathes its incense to the soul so deep,
  With thee holds commune in each sigh.

The fields thou walkest when Spring's green
  Hath clothed each bush with Nature's charms;
Beneath the bursting sod hath seen
The planted seed shoot forth between,
  And gladly wave its baby arms.

The gray-haired planter's smile content
  Is born of hope; the world is large,
Yet all of human love is spent
On one small plot; the heart pays rent
  To Hope slow-floating in a barge.

Worlds stately wheel through spaceless space,
  Nor pause, nor veer, but onward go,
As steadily as planets race,
Wings hope beyond earth's rugged face,
  Nor leaves a trail of bitter woe.

JUST WHY I LOVE THEE.

JUST why I love thee it is hard to tell;
Thou art not handsome in the strictest sense,
And yet thy face holds something so intense,
That I am drawn to thee as by a spell.

If thou wert gone from me — dead, — had ceased to dwell
In mortal flesh, had passed to that dread Whence,
Perhaps thine eyes with their broad innocence,
Would hold me longest, since I loved them well;

Or, mayhap, thy sweet mouth, where all my kisses went,
Or thy soft cheek that nestled close to mine,
Might claim attention; and thy smooth hands that often blent
The very workings of my soul with thine.

Of them? O Love! with thee at present let me rest
content,
Nor ask me why, for who knows what makes the
stars divine?

BEFORE LOVE'S MEETING.

WHAT were the days before I saw thy face?
In looking back I scarce can see their dawn,
And yet I know that surely, truly they were born
And held aloof our meeting for a space.
What was my life, and by whose grace
Its leaden hours made myself forlorn,
Till near the roadside strayed I, haggard and well worn,
And fell exhausted, weary with the chase?

Ah, Love, those days were dark! and yet no blame
Should we attach to Fate's unseen decree,
Else were unknown the bliss of meeting flame to flame,
Our Eden of love's great purity;
Else were unknown the first soul-cry thy name
Brought to my lips to utter musically.

MY STAR.

WHEN my star dawned
In love's blue sky,
On my soul fawned
Hopes that were high.
I felt my lease on earth expand,
Till she and I went hand in hand,
Fast hurrying onward through the land.

A castle here,
Another there
We built. No tear
Marred our dream fair;
So made we chamber, made we hall;
The castle parapets were straight and tall,
While sweetest incense filled them all.

Our only thought
To build them high.
And thus we wrought
Our mansions by
Strange drawings of a force unseen;
And round about left fields of green,
Where silvery rivers danced between.

A garden made we,
Rose-embowered,
Where daily played we
Half o'erpowered
By heavy perfumes falling round;
Oft the new moon looked in and found
Two spirits resting on the ground.

Then in the shade
Of some old wood,
We'd fain parade
In gayest mood;
And every bird that heard our laugh
One moment paused as tho' to quaff
A sweeter song than his, by half.

I would regret
That here on earth
We're born to fret
For higher birth, —
Did not my star look kindly through
With smiles, from heaven's bars of blue,
And tell me that my dreams were true !

From its high station
Leagues removed,
By radiation
It has proved
Beyond the smallest kind of doubt,
How tender love is, and how stout
The heart that weathers love's strange bout.

I often watch it,
And at night
I often match it
In fancy's flight,
To some vague world in that great space
Unknown to man of any race,
Then of a sudden I see *her* face.

THE THISTLE BIRD.

HE scarcely stirs the pollen off the thist e's crest;
He scarcely seems to move, yet round he goes,
While his pure color in the distance shows,
Till one know not if it be some flower dressed
In palest gold, and of heaven blessed,—
Or but some maple's leaf that blows
Alway in autumn, till some zephyr, pitying, stows
It 'mid some thistle's crown to rest.

So thou, my love, I know not whence thou came,
Nor what chill wind's unfostering care
Hath blown thee and thy mute despair
Safe to the sheltering harbor of my flame.
But this my love, I know: henceforth my fare
Is thine; for each hereafter life holds the same.

THE DOUBT FEAST.

OH, my princess, wouldst thou know
The dream that I had dreamed as true?
Then fold thy wrap around thee — so,
And I will slowly give it to you.
Don't ask me whence or how it came,
If night or day did give it birth;
My answers all will be the same:
"Listen and judge it by its worth."

Strange may it seem, yet doth not life
A thousand strangest fountains spurt?
And is not man in constant strife
To keep his mind above the dirt?
So, my princess, thou'lt not molest
My flow of thought, however strange,
Nor break upon me when I seem pressed
For happy words to fill my range?

No? Then I'll tell thee; listen now,
And find, if there, the hidden charm
To help thee keep the sacred vow
That folds thee tightest at alarm.

I dreamed I'd lost amid the rush
Of hurrying feet that came and went,
And idly all their power spent
Upon the wind of midnight's hush,
Amid the vistas and the glow
That slowly crept across the lawn,
And slowly climbed to meet the dawn,
And wider, wider seemed to grow: —

Amid the vapors that o'er prest,
And crouched and rolled along the shore
And blotted out the light before
The fleeing waves that never rest:
I dreamed I'd lost the charméd tie,
That kept my love from wandering far,
And, fading fast, my guiding star
Was melting deep within the sky.

In changing moods the spirit blew,
A subtle substance in each thought:
And wilder, weaker seemed my lot,
And deep from darkest fountains drew.
With restless hands each fleeting gleam
I sought to hold in frantic grasp;
But all the senses felt the rasp,
And horror-stricken was my scream.

Pursuing I a phantom light
Held in a phantom's hollow hand,
I wandered far across the land,
And sought to find it with a might.
With every step I fainter grew,
The heavens reeled, the earth was dank,
The darkness deeper, deeper sank,
And not a gleam of hope broke through,

Till all my life was at an ebb,
And all the sands were bare and gray,
And every soul seemed but as prey,
That floated to the subtle web;

Till every summer thing hung low,
  And every voice was but a moan;
  And on the shore I stood alone,
With scarce a welcome to bestow;

And close behind me rose a cliff;
  And on each side a dismal waste,
  Where purple shadows shadows chased,
And laved the rocks that stood so stiff.
And all before the angry sea;
  And I alone upon the shore
  Stood longing sea-ward, till high o'er
My weary head a light broke free.

Was this the guiding star returned
  To lead me where the tie-charm lay
  And bring again the vanished day
That in this hell of night seemed burned?
I asked the thought with scarce a hope;
  I followed where it cleft the night,
  And through the dimness of my sight,
I saw a palace portal ope.

A joy that falleth late in years,
An offering from the shrine of Love,
A baby from the realm above,
That cometh with a thousand tears
Of happy hope fulfilled at last,
Of murmurs to the bosom pressed;
A happy mother's boy caressed
By holy love that broke a fast.

A thousand times we watch the smile
That settles in the changing eyes;
And cheeks that wear the crimson dyes
Of color that does not defile;
The kicking feet, the patting hands,
The little laugh that is a crow;
The silky hair that first does show
A cunning feature 'neath its bands.

We watch; what hope takes wing
And weaves a halo round its head?
O Love, were all thy angers shed
Before ye sent this offering?

We wait: a fuller life we see unfold;
The tie was strongest when 'twas weak;
Before the stranger's voice could speak,
A thousand longings inward rolled.

Thus when I saw the portal ope,
And all the vast array of wealth,
I felt that stealing in by stealth
Was dawning for me some great scope
Of supreme bliss to overflow;
And all the fret of something lost,
Into the cowering Past I tost,
And on the threshold bowed I low.

Who taught the lips to utter prayer
And breathe the holy hope of love,
And left the waiting heart to prove
That substance floated in the air?
We say, "Away my tempter with thy smile,
'Tis but a weakness of the soul,"
Or, "He doth win the highest goal
Who dallies at her feet awhile."

I dallied at the portal door;
  I dared not enter lest a curse;
  Before the splendor I felt worse,
Than when the darkness pressed me sore.
I waited for some sign to come,
  A hundred times I knew it came;
  I felt the pulses of the flame,
Yet by my doubts I stood as dumb.

Could I return from whence I sprung,
  Out of my mute despair and woe,
  And suffer all the light to go,
And hear again the mockeries rung?
I fled before the thought accursed;
  I crossed the door-sill, entered in,
  When lo! around me seemed to spin,
A thousand pleasures for my thirst.

I drank them in, lived drinking them;
  I now but sip that they may last;
  And deep within me they have cast
A beauty, as flower to the flower's stem;

And all the doubt that I had felt,
  And all the misery of the doubt,
  Is in the Past, was left without,
Is circled by Oblivion's belt.

And now, my princess, jewel-crowned
  By dimpled arms and basking eyes
  And warm-toned ankles, what surprise
Sits on thy brow as if ye frowned?
Hast thou not found a meaning there
  To warm thy cheeks to ruddy glow,
  And in thy inner heart to stow
The substance of a finer air?

I've led my fancy wilder chase,
  Have roamed where weakling feet would fall;
  Have heard the siren's luring call, —
Yet none so tender as thy face;
No eyes that called to me like thine;
  No breath hath parted fairer lips;
  No bee of rarer honey sips,
Than Love when vowing songs divine.

I must not mantle lover-words,
  Nor shade the meaning I would tell,—
  Confess in openness? Ah! the spell
Is dearer than the summer's birds,
And bids me range unfrequent ways,
  To pluck a grass or bring a flower;
  In tender depths to spend an hour,
And dream as present future praise.

And is not doubt a sacred thing —
  A finer spell than plainest truth,
  And wakes an interest, and, forsooth,
Releases soothings for its sting?
What depths we range and cannot tire!
  What depths and heights like billows rear!
  The meanest hovels we compare
With heavenly mansions' boasting spire!

And has it not a stronger glare,
  The light from groping in the dark?
  And does it leave the love more stark,
The soul, to find a soul is there?

Yet after all a word is pain
  Or pleasure as we take it first;
  The germ some clod of earth has nursed,
What it was once 'twill be again.

COMMON PROPERTY.

SO faithful thy portrait is,
That were I blind, as Love is said to be,
Methinks I still would know
That the glad sun had kissed your face to me;
That his hot breath had breathed your lips upon,
And merged them deep within that flame,
Which, years ago, did warm this heart of mine,
And kindle in me that wild hope of fame.

Thus each outline, curved in subtle grace,
Recalls some pleasure past when you did wear
So lightly the sorrows of your childhood years,
While the same sheen still clasps thy hair,
And the same smile, not proud, still curves
Those lips that oft,— so oft I kissed.
Then no doubt assailed my castle walls,
And o'er my broad fields there hung no mist.

But now the day 's gone, and the Night
That strikes a terror to my breast
Has fallen round me. From within a cry
Mounts upward, and a wild unrest
Clings like a shroud about my heart;
For as I walked the street where countless foot-
beats fall,
Saw I a lustful crowd that gazed upon
Thy well-known features, spell-binding all.

Great God, my angel's fallen! Sin hath won.
By show of wealth her virtue's turned about.
O heart of mine, that some swift bolt of heaven
Could smite me senseless, and my reason rout!
Not that I love thee less; not that I think of thee
As harlot to some base man's use,
For oh! too deep thy tender memories dip
That I should wound them by my thought's abuse.

And now — thou art — property — for all.
Apart — our footsteps — echo — as we move —
through life.
My brow seems hot; a shiver curves its way,
Chilling as does the keen-edged knife

That fancy uses. I cannot think you gone;
Death were a preference to this mad thought.
Look up! fond eyes; lips, may I kiss again?
O sweet pictured face, that thou wert what thou
art not!

THE RUSH OF MEMORIES.

THEY crowd about me at the day's close ;
I see them in my pathway — stern.
Their eyes like fires in heaven do burn
And yearn
To hold me in repose.

Frail mortals of an engulfed Time,
Past frailities the earth hath known ;
Seed of a mighty harvest sown
And thrown
Amid the furrows of another clime.

Lost hopes, unanswered, heart-rent prayers,
Illusive gleams of wit and merry jest —
These soul-born memories to the breast
Oft pressed :
Such are the tokens they claim as theirs.

At midnight they watch me from the wall.
The chime of clock-struck hours cannot change
The star-pierced darkness, nor their range
Of strange
And luring calls that do not call.'

A MORNING'S MUSINGS.

I WALKED abroad, the sun came o'er the plain,
His eastern splendor awakening thoughts grown cold:
I saw sweet flowers bestrewing the grassy main,
And, in almost childish glee, I gazed on them again;
And whilst I looked the mists of night were slain,
And morning dawned with gleams of silver and of gold.

I stopped and looked around; all motion ceased;
And to me came a world of troubled thought;
My heart which seemed so still again increased
Its palpitations, and words held dumb were now released;
I viewed in wonder this glory of the East, —
This grand magnificence of nature wrought.

"And this," I said, "is morn; these flowers lend
A perfumed breath to lull the senses by;
These breezes, floating through yon meadows, send
A lasting pleasure as they ascend
From earth to heaven, and tend
To lift our thoughts to Him on high."

Close by my side a little flower grew,
Its many colors vieing with those of morn;
Its petals still were moist with evening's dew,
Mirroring within its heart high heaven's blue,
And, as beneath my foot its slender form I drew,
I felt that to be crushed all things are born.

"Alas!" I sighed, "man 's but a slender reed,
Who bows to Death's cold, grasping hand,
And flees before his breath as Byron's steed,
Which flew the Steppes o'er with reckless speed,
Bearing, lashed to his side by vengeance's creed,
Mezappa, held by tight-drawn band."

"And what is life," thought I, "that we should hug so close,
And fain like some rare gem to keep it here?

Tis but a stream that through a desert flows —
A vast tide's ebb that comes and goes
At last to sink in sweet repose,
Somehow, somewhere, clarified and clear.

A SOLILOQUY.

PERHAPS I've never felt the keen desire
Born in some souls to consummate some feat
Worthy to page a history or ope a lyre
To impassioned splendor, and enjoy the treat.

Who knows? not those unused to me,
For, surely, if my friends still doubt my ways,
How can they? we cannot gauge the seeds of the
To Be,
Nor early lavish on unstinted praise.

Should we, what disappointment were for us?
Not always, to be sure, but then it comes,
And once is all sufficient; they adore us
When our fingers show them they are not thumbs.

They take us at our word, sometimes, then spurn
us;
They twist us forward and they bend us back.
How many sleeve-laughs do they earn us!
I must confess they're highly learned in the
knack.

FREE BORN.

IF half my years had free from sorrow been,
And grim Want's eyes had not exchanged with mine,
What wondrous flowers had I carved for men,
Upward twining and never to untwine!

If all my footsteps could have claimed the path
Leading straight forward to my mind's high goal,
Within my inner precincts would have sprung no wrath
To mock the finer feelings of the soul.

If some large hand had pulled the *purple* on
My infant limbs that kicked with sturdy grace,
Perhaps the fine-haired sons to fashion born
On bended knee would envy me my place.

If — but fie! who cares to know the if?
I am free-born, at least this is enough for me.
Come, Nature, of thy domain I'd sniff,
Nor catch me lolling near proud fashion's tree.

THE RETURN FROM THE SWINE-HERD.

GOD of my one score years,
Why in this breast these pains?
Why in this heart such fears?
Never a hope sustains,
Never a face but leers,
Never a voice that's true:
Now I have turned to you.

Hast thou power to drive from me
The weakness of body and mind?
Is the strength of your arm as free
As the gush of a mighty wind?
I am lost in immensity,
I am dead to all but a few;
I am lost to the world, — to you?

I crave but one moment's plea;
Art thou good thou wilt listen and judge.
I have sinned, — done folly, yet we
Are but clay and thy nudge.
I would ask that thy sentence on me
Be commuted, else I may construe
All goodness as lacking in you.

I would ask that my days be made long,
I have faith that the end will be bright;
My prayer is to grow and be strong,
To see and to know thy light,
To mingle and be of thy throng.
I have suffered much pain, — now renew
My flesh and my faith in you.

Let the oil of thy hand drop fast
On the pain that shrieks in my breast;
Let the voice of a hope float past,
Till I know that my life's not a jest;
Let thy presence a bright halo cast,
So I'll see both the old and the new,
So I'll strive to be brave and reach you.

For oh, God of my darkened years,
My faith has been small and ill-shaped,
And bitter the fall of my tears,
While devilish faces have aped,
And hideous cries reached my ears;
And now that a spark to me's flew
Will its flame lead me onward to you?

SUSPECTED.

I.

FAINT hearted nature forcing a crimson tint
Up from the throat to suffuse all the face
And bow the head in shame at the disgrace
Conveyed to all by the low-toned hint.
Why art thou not strong to bear this stint,
O cowering heart, and by fearless eye erase
This charge that signals thee as base,
And steals a coin from out thy sacred mint?

Hark ye! I have read thy secret thought,
And know just when the quivering lips had made
Fain to tell with eyes full to the lids,
The full-souled secret of thy unenvious lot;
But still witheld for fear thy tears had played
Sad havoc in the heart that holds thy bids.

II.

Tut, tut! throw off this lethargy and stand
With fearless eye before thy God and man.
With all thy might cast hence this accursed ban,
And take thy fell accuser by the hand.
Thine it is to counter this command,
And level dustward, and with smile not wan
To say: "Master, thou art wrong; I can
And will release mys lf from this foul brand."

Then will the world with many smiles approve,
And thou wilt feel the essence of a newer life
Surge through thy veins, and lift thy heart
To higher joy and rarer forms of love.
Thou wilt feel girded for the after-strife,
And count as naught the days before this recent
start.

EMANCIPATION.

BEHOLD! the world hath smiles and bows,
Earth seems to gladden to the sight,
The day is never gloomed by night
Since I have made my manhood vows.

Life's phases flicker on my gaze;
Dim future 's half revealed to me;
I catch the glimpse of far-off sea
On which I'll pass my after days.

A-down the busy marts I go,
And Self in youth strides on beside,
Like fountain head and boundless tide
That by strange chance together flow.

The world doth wear a brightening hue;
Each color hath a charm for me;
In mind the waves of ecstacy
Are peopled with a brilliant crew.

The west side of life's line hath dawned,
  The east hath slipped beyond recall;
  And dim and dark in Memory's hall,
Strange gleanings of my youth are spawned.

I see the house that knew me well,—
  That held my secrets when a boy,
  And leaped in heart at every joy,
Or stood in gloom when sorrow fell;

The trees that shaded roof and tower,
  And trickled sunshine on the panes;
  And wildly veering weather-vanes,
That glistened in each thunder-shower;

The garden walls where grape-vines trailed;
  The kennel with its tenant dead;
  The flowers in their tidy bed;
The dark-green lattice often scaled;

The long gray walks where weeds were kept
  From green encroachments on the sand;
  The cedars where the song-birds planned,
And 'mid the foliage hopped and leapt.

Within, the spiral stair-way, carved and bold;
The long, dim hall; my little room
That holds my childhood, as the tomb
Holds all of life so briefly doled.

All this when youth was past I saw,
And manhood gained its primary place;
And turned to all a bearded face,
Where lay no trace of puerile flaw.

I SMILE AT GRIEF.

UPON the threshold of my joy,
Grief, crowned with all that's bright and fair,
And looking as a maiden coy,
Who pauses at the altar stair, —

Watching with eyes that hold the glow
Of fiery passions 'neath the lash;
Which bubble up and overflow,
And at her love affections dash:

Upon my threshold pauses she,
And waits for me to show some sign.
I give it not; my ecstacy
To one more worthy I'll resign.

Her smile is as the spider's web
Decked with the crystals of the night;

And cometh as the flow and ebb
Of tides that have no other flight.

So yet awhile I'll keep my joy,
Nor hold it lightly; but as some gem
That sparkles rich without alloy
I'll wear it in my diadem.

I smile at grief, and men all ask:
"What wondrous treasure do you hold?"
Yet did they guess how hard the task —
How long the weary days seemed doled,

They would not envy me my smiles,
Nor thicker thorn my Alpine way;
But marvel how Grief's many wiles,
Could find me smiling day by day.

WOMAN'S WAY.

HOW had I made it known,
By what occult power forced to speak
Those words that in my heart had grown —
Those words that Love had sown,
In that ill-visioned week?

All seems a dream that came at night,
And, like a dream to vanish with the morn.
That yesterday did seem so bright
When bathed within the light
That showed the holy where Christ was born.

Then came that silence to which all pay
So much attention, and which to love is pure:
It joins the hearts as soft winds cool the day,
And so all thoughts are one in love's sweet colloquy,
And touch the soul so softly, yet so sure.

And in that silence our minds do know,
That which our hearts do long to say;
That mysterious completeness which seems to grow
Spontaneous, and through the veins to flow
Like sparkling waters at the close of day.

She broke the stillness, and with a gentle sigh
She raised her timid eyes unto my own;
Then, as if her mind had formed a question and reply,
She dropped them; though with me no need deny,
I felt their power more than love's soft tone.

"My Lilian," I said, "the night is getting chill,
And though I fain would linger here,
I do so now quite much against my will,
So let's return, — this dampness, love, will kill,
And we must harbor strength; so come, my dear."

Thus arm in arm we loitered back again
Beneath those shades where first I met
This love who soon would give me pain;

We wandered, yes, we wandered back again,
And in the darkness there I felt her cheeks all wet.

. . . . . .

But this is dead past; of years ago a score,
And sere as autumn's leaves my face has grown;
Yet oft I see her as handsome as of yore, —
Tall, stately, — a woman to adore.
I held her dearest, then — now? well, years have flown.

I never envy him, though I took my chance.
I lost at love the same as whist or any game.
He won; I lost. Mine is a broken lance,
And one might know it at half a glance,
I don't conceal it for I feel no shame.

Yes, I must plod on, not stand and moan my fate,
Else would I make my life a flame-white hell,
And always find a reason for a drunken state,
Or plead an excuse for my being late.
But what tone is there in a broken bell?

So don't waste pity on such as I,
I do not need it; I have lived too long.
She has been happy; my aims were low, not high,
And love's swift current has run the fountain dry;
So let me go beguiling self in song.

AMONG THE REEDS.

PRONE on the bank, while round me rustling leaves
Bear testimony of the wind's long stretch;
'Tis only I, the dreamer, who sees the garnered sheaves
That stand waist-deep and which no men fetch.

Up breathes a little whisper from the shore,—
'Tis not of Trade, though trade's white wing gleams farther out;
I scarcely hear, and yet I ask the waves for more,—
For answer, they beat the pebbles round as in a flout.

Ah, ye tall reeds that sway all summer long!
Ah, ye limp waves that bathe their gleaming sides!
Long held a captive amid the swaying throng
I've dreamed; my dreams lilt as the tides.

Poor worm of earth am I, haunting the quiet nooks;
Shorn of all glow suffused by colors dun;
No summer sunsets, — wintry with dead-tree looks,
And songs that never felt the central sun.

Scarce of this life seem I; dead to the millions' eyes;
The spider's gauzy web less frail than I.
My world? the space betwixt these reeds and yonder skies.
My purpose? as the fates may will it ere I die.

AN ARROW.

OH, the wide eyes that cannot see,
And the full brain tha never knows,
But vaguely, blindly, wandering, goes
Backward, forward, unthinkingly.
Slow to catch the glimmer on the sea,
Slow to breath the air that stows
Sweet life within the dungeon's close;
Slow to think of sunsets tenderly.

Pardon, I beg, for pointing this at *you*;
To the arms' full length the bow was drawn,
And if the arrow straight the distance flew,
Pluck from thy heart, and charge it to my brawn
Haply the centre reached: if so, you knew
That I would no deadly malice spawn.

TO JOHN KEATS.

I.

I MUST a line, dear Keats, thy memory tend;
Tho' poor, 'tis only so because my lips
And pen fail to convey the feeling that deep-dips
In holy reverence. You will forgive the *words* I send;
For what are mere scratches here, when at the fountain's end
The pure crisp honey clogs and over fine expression tips?
That thou art great is known, since thy full ships
Bear cargoes of pure thought wherever they may wend.

From me, a weakling among so many men of note,
Perhaps this boldness may be frowned upon;
And yet the Widow's mite pleased Him; she dealt
Out love, respect and deep esteem; each fiber near,—remote,
Bowed low before the Sovereign. So, tho' some may scorn,
If thou art pleased, I'll deem all blows unfelt.

II.

Not that others have told your greatness to me
Do I write, for oh! the hours that my heart lay close to thine
Are numerous. I've felt their beatings mingle at the holy shrine,
While all my pulses throbbed expectantly.
Dear bard whose soul illumes each thought, — to thee
I owe a world of pleasure. At thy board thy wine
Has made me dizzy with delight. Around thy neck I'd twine
My arms and suffer all that you might suffer willingly.

For had I lived when you were here and knew
All that I know now, none would have sought
More closely for thy comfort, nor tried to ease thee with a word
Than I. But it were folly to look back and brew
O'er what might have been; thy battle has been fought,
And victory — ah! thy victory — all the world has heard.

MY FAITH.

I DON'T know what death means, nor dare I think
Of all the many fancies my mind consumes.
There must be somewhere, though, an after state, but where, I shrink
From saying. 'Tis well that life resumes
Its sway, its clash, its many wiles and quirks,
Just at the moment when one seems eaten
With fearful thirst of knowledge. We know life shirks
The body, — goes away — but at this point we're beaten.
One cannot go beyond, and dig and delve, or pry
The secret from dear dumb lips.
If there be life again for those who die,—
If death is, as men say, the power that slips
The veil which darkens mortal vision back, —
We each must wait in turn till life doth cease
Ere we can press the feet upon that unknown track.

Life is a tenant fearful of his lease;
Yet none can ever occupy the cell
But his own self; and, when he leaves it, quick decay
Turns it back to dust. 'Tis well!
Nature sees further than mortal vision can. We pray
For light, that something may reveal the latent power
Which governs birth and all its actions.
But vain our longings, it remains unknown; the hour
Of our coming and our going's shrouded deep; it shuns
A contact with our mortal ways, lies covered
As a flower's seed within the womb of earth,
And no prayer, however fervent it hath hovered
Up from yearning soul, hath ever one ounce of wisdom brought. Dearth
Of knowledge, wrapt in a void of gloom, always, the soul
Beats against its barriers of flesh, hoping against hope
That some weak point may yield the wished-for goal.

Some there are, who claim to know — have seen; whose scope
Of sapient sense touches the deep profundity of space;
Whose marvelous words are wells of inspired thought

From which the thirsty ought to sup; who have stood
face to face
With God upon His parapets, and from thence have
brought
First handed and unalloyed Truth, white robéd as a
ship.
But ah! their great wisdom, fine rhetoric, can never
touch here;
They know of death what I know; neither more nor
less. They slip
Where some stand firm, stand where others fall.
Through fear
Some are conquered, — bend their necks to the stroke
Death deals; yet wish to pass unseen; are afraid
Of the depth of night, and call it — faith. Mere
smoke
That blinds for a time, — since the duty's been paid,
Then dissolves, leaving emptiest air in its place.

Don't deem my faith palsied, — a swallow's swift flight
The breadth of my hope. I see through the land a
benevolent face
That transports me beyond the pains of the night,

That leaves a wide margin to stand on, — a handle to grasp,
A something to die for, unknown though it be. If I reach
By my life the *merit* of death, — if I clasp
The hand of a stranger and guide him along, — teach
Him the way, perform my duty of man unto man,
I fear not the end with its close-fitting mask,
Since a confidence perfect points to an infinite plan;
And a life robed in its faith is a pleasurable task
And its finish draws the past to itself; not an atom is lost

That ought to be saved. Men spade for some pleasure
To occupy time, not heeding that with the clay's cost
Enough is thrown in to round up the measure.
Then I have my own doubts, my convictions, as men ought and do;
I grant to some teachings they're utterly false, and, granting,
Have I not the right to claim that to others they're true?

Hope never is stilled; like heat it brings panting,
And faith does not mould to the form most frequent in use;
It comes as a wave to some, ebbing and flowing.
To me it's an infant: I pray no abuse
Will deform it, will crush it, will hinder its growing.

DO YOU REMEMBER?

DO you remember when we stood alone
Beneath green boughs and August skies,
When I with all a lover's love
Did gaze deep down within thine eyes?

And you, alone, were sweetly, smiling,
One hand placed tenderly in mine,
Ah! how well do I remember,—
The birds were singing, the sun did shine!

And then, once more we stood,—
This time to part, to burn our young life's ember,
No birds were singing, no sun was shining,
Love, do you remember?

AT THE FEET OF A STATUE.

I ONLY ask of thee one smile — one look
That Love begets, — one fragrant breath
Thy presence wrought; and I would brook
A thousand furies, aye! court death
To win but one; yet no device
Will move. Immovable thine eyes and sealed lips —
They are but art; thy finger tips,
Art also; thy soul — an idle caprice.

Nude, but for the covering Shame lent
To Eve. Filled with the veins
Where blood floweth not, nor life; not passioned.
Dreamed of by night; by day beheld and fashioned.
Born of a soul, — yet soulless; labor and pains
All on the surface, — against it spent.
Deemed above sin — sinless; yet stay! to sin unrisen,
Age upon age, mite upon mite alike powerless.

Dreams, desires, touch of the chisel impotent and
wasted,
For still in the cells of thy prison
Voiceless thy voice is, thy being dowerless,
Life and its birth-pains, afar and untasted.

Fain would I redeem thee, — release,
Breathe soul and power in thine eyes;
With wand of the wizard touch thee, and thy guise
Fling to the winds, and with perfect love my own ap-
pease.

LOVE.

AND have I not broken many laws
That bound men's souls to some fantasy or dream,—
Some hidden, death-like passway in the brain,
Where surging faces of the Past, like fireflies dart and train,
Then die away, save for a hurried gleam
That cleaves the tissues and snatches recollection from Death's jaws?

Have I not turned the tablets men unfurled
To other uses than those to which
They first were drawn? loosened the film
That covered secrets of the earth till all that once was dim
Stands out in bold relief? delved from ditch to ditch
For hidden remnants of a viewless world?

Certain untruths have I not exposed?
  Laid bare the crowning efforts of minds of sin,—
Mixed with life's food a cordial of vast might,
And let, through crevices of reason, a strange new light
  Powerful to reveal the thought within
The delicate fibres of a brain composed?

The stars that clothe their mystic wanderings
  In walls of white-hot flame, to me have made
Confessions! Did I not tell how swift they move,
What atmosphere surrounds each seething mass, — and
    prove
  That those are straying which once were deemed so
    staid
And steady: that all have subtle panderings?

And when I confess my love is more sure
  Than human laws, — deeper than world-plowed space,
Truth personified; thus when I'd stretched my whole
    life's hope
To bridge a chasm for thee to pass, and doing, ope
  For thee a pleasure to pinch with pain my face,
Would not it prove sufficient thy very soul to lure?

If when I confess, my heart like some stars
  Is wrapped in tongues of flame, — not mute,
Senseless tongues, but pregnant with immortal thought,
Ready to teach to thee what love's red furnace taught —
  One willing to learn a beggar's wail, or the voice of a
    lute,
Or the hectic red of the planet Mars, —

Could you doubt, or if you did,
  Would it lessen your love? Would it make you cling
To a mountain of rock to avoid a fear
Seeming to shout from afar, then crowding so near
  That your soul would turn, and, like a leaf quivering,
You'd stand half dead awaiting its bid?

If it would, speak out and let me know;
  Let a faithful answer for once go down
From age to age as precedent. Don't stand dumb and
    attempt to be shy; —
But it wouldn't? Amen! no doubt in that eye,
  In that smile no fear, on that brow no frown.
And now like planets afire, through space we'll go.

AT DEATH.

WASTE not fine marble o'er my grave —
Build not to me a senseless monument of stone;
The earth that 's last to hold me 's all I crave:
I'll meet death like a warrior brave,
And never shall man hear grumbling in my tone.

Warm words burn not cold marble's side,
And never deeper sink than when first made;
And stone, at best, can claim but chilling pride;
So, when I die, let all such nonsense slide,—
And feed the sparrows with what else were paid.

I do not slur the hand that carves such shapes,
Nor deem it folly to learn the sculptor's ways;
Men's tastes are varied, tho' when thought escapes,
I grant 'tis better to carve gods than apes;
Yet I prefer remembrance to such praise.

I only wish two slabs of modest size,—
To mark my length and tell the name I bore.
When man is swept to where no man's eyes
Can see,— where present life would be surprise —
Two simple stones, like these, can hold life's score.

But flowers, grasses, leaves— all things that show
The workmanship of God,— place everywhere,
For these I love; I'd have small children throw
Such tributes to me when the reign of snow
Lays pallid cheeks close to my bosom there.

THE COMER OF THE NIGHT.

I'VE never faced one dream of mine
That lured me with its yellow dross;
I've never grasped the slender hand,
That beckoned like a fairy's wand,
And bade me the abyss to cross.

I only hope that I shall see
Those deep brown eyes half filled by tears.
Too wide from cliff to cliff to leap:
The beetling heights to climb so steep,
That dreaming, I am awed by fears.

There, like a half-formed thought it is,—
My dream, — my Comer of the Night;
There the white robes flutter in the wind,
Like fancies passing in the mind
Of some philosopher in flight.

How it eludes me when I reach for it!
Thin air it is my nimble fingers crush,
And not the real, true substance it doth seem;
Frightened, I wake, and trembling count my dream,
While all its vagaries flit through me with a rush.

THE STAR WATCH.

THERE is no blot upon my life to mar
The wide-souled beauty of my dream of God;
For in the boundless space of ether gleams a star,
That cleansed my coming from the very sod.

How keen I watch it through the pulsing night!
Its every twinkle to my soul does thrill!
And, as I fix my mind upon the awful flight,
I read the wisdom of God's large will.

Long by the casement, like a monk at prayers,
I lean my thoughts against its blessed ray;
While, one by one, I mount the unseen stairs
Which upward wind to the Eternal Day,

Till in deep thought I seek repose,
All wearied by the vigil of my trust;
And to the eastward, rich with crimson glows,
I see the morn caress the old earth's crust.

Even in sleep its beauties still remain,
And quick the mind to leap the fearful space;
And while the day full half the earth does pain,
I dream of heaven and the star's pure face.

THE GOODNESS OF MAN.

ALL good men learn their goodness by their power to see
To what great depths the balm of kindness goes;
Devotion to a cause brings subtilty,
And kindnesses in all subtile hearts repose.

Whatso dwelleth in the heart of man,
It sometime finds its way outward to the air,
And be it of evil or of good, it must stand the scan
Of world-eyes; if good how great its share!

A good man, methinks, acts as a drop of oil
Cast upon the tides when winds blow high;
His own hue smooths out anger to its last coil,
And but a single finger-touch will make it die.

All things take color from the brooding mind.
The world would reek with gloom were all minds dark;
How lovely to perceive the cheerfulness of thought behind
The echoing gladness of some soaring lark!

NUDITY.

I SEE but beauty in the naked form,
The beauty artists love and purest thoughts admire;
Nor greed of lust nor lechery can worm
From me the smallest flamelet of a sinful fire.

I am but mortal, yet have power of will
To clutch both hands about the panting throat
Of Passion, and hold her hot breath still,
And stifle every sigh that breathes a wanton note.

Who cannot look on God's supremest work,
And see wise love in every graceful turn,
Is dead to beauty; — only evils within such lurk,
And round the soul the fires of passion burn.

TO "W. H. G."

KEEN priest of nature with thy double powers' stroke
Opening to view the varied woodland's charms
With aught beneath thy gaze, we thank thee for thy alms
Of gracious words that tender, boyish memories awoke.
Here, in the mind's eye, the sturdy oak
Waves its wide limbs and chants its bosky psalms;
There the dense pine, boasting the storms and calms,
And all around the mild-eyed, nimble-moving folk.

Well art thou equipped for this thy supreme joy;
And we, like honey bees with thoughts athirst,
Wait to sip the nectar of thy by-way's lair,
That yields up riches which the winds do cloy
Thy soul with, till it needs must burst,
And scatter all its sweetness everywhere.

THE SOUL'S DAY.

I ALWAYS feel at the close of the week,
A load of wearing, mechanical pain,
Removed from back; my thoughts all seek
The morrow intuitively, — earth seems new again,
And I draw a full, lung-satisfying breath,
While my poor soul bursts its fetters with joy,
And the week of care but leaves a boy,
Ready to grant the heart's desire, —
To play with love — as I would with fire;
Or, *perhaps I've a dream that reaches higher,* —
One to live after the stroke of death.

It may seem a mite that I have to do,
When placed at the side of some men's work;
Yet I push and haul; but the soul sinks through.
The body still weaves tho' the soul does shirk

Tho' my eyes are away beyond the walls,
I weave my life and my living earn;
But the quick blood in the arteries burn,
And sounds that my comrades never hear
Pulse, pulse, within till they reach the ear,
And I stand stock-still with a look not near,
Then,—a swift jar, and the real world brawls.

I catch up the thread and the shuttles fly;
The cloth of the earth grows fine, grows white,—
But the fabrics I weave in my bit of sky,
Are spun of dreams not born at night,—
Not seen amid flashes of fitful sleep.
I claw and hammer,— hope comes and goes,
The ocean rolls in, but it outward flows.
Can a pearl be left by the ebbing tide
For a hand to grasp,—for a heart to hide,
Or, when it takes its last long stride,
Does it slip again to the quivering deep?

I liken the ocean sometimes to life, —
It has many moods for who can see;
It is torn by elements, men by strife,
And it fumes and grows calm and seems so free,—

Yet always is faced by a stretch of land.
Wave succeeds wave,—men come and go;—
Thus ever in life an ebb and a flow,
A glorious struggle to reach the high mark.
The white crests tremble and break in the dark,
Then the nude shore-line lies stiff and stark,
And life seems a mirror, indeed, of sand.

Thus ever I weave; but at the week's end,
I feel strength to bear, and I never groan;
I borrow from ease, and all care lend;
I stretch forth and soothe those who mumble and moan,—
Those whose cross is a fever that never dies.
I seek the deep wood,— and God seems near,
And the soul uncoils from its bed of fear.
Ah, earth is good tho' it shakes and twists —
Tho' the valley be full of last week's mists.
I count all my joys (and I have full lists),
From the eagle's flight to the pale butterfly's.

Content with a pencil of camel's hair,
I lay on color and fashion a face;

The model sits still while I paint her there,
  Line for line and grace for grace,
Till the soul shines out from the mass of flesh —
  Till the voice all but fills the parted lips.
  Which should one envy, the bee that sips
From deep-red roses the hidden sweet,
The jewelled dart whose wings swift beat
  Till the air is wrought to a fevered heat,
Or the honey itself in the flower's mesh?

Who is void of words may be full of thought,
  Lacking but faith in the power of speech;
Or fearing the voice might draw too taut
  The moments of pleasure that round such reach.
Thus do I sit in a world of flight,
  Leaning against my hand my head,
  Now pausing, now starting, while the soul's road-bed
Lies pure and clear like the moonlight's gleam,
That bathes hill and valley and silvers the stream
  With its broad, soft beauty. What if the night-hawk's
    scream
Wakes tumbling echoes to build affright?

To-morrow 's the day of days; how still we'll dwell;
Clouds will scarce move thro' heaven's vault.
Will earth turn and turn? Will it rush pell-mell?
They tell us so — can they be at fault?

By some wise providence do all men grope in gloom,
Betrayed by delicate instruments thro' paths that lie
Far from the altar of true knowledge? How men try
To wrest from fiery points the truth of things,
And if 'tis truth they learn, what comfort wings
Into the awed bosom by such whisperings?
All things of earth find earth their tomb.

A VIEW AT MIDNIGHT.

BETWEEN the eye of night and earth
The flimsy clouds hang — wonder-shapes;
Great shadows on the sea have birth,
And each the other mocks and apes.
Upon the hill that seems so dearth
Of all the brightness of the land
Alone in listless pose I stand,
And watch the sloth-like moving lights
Upon the ocean's bosom creep,
And their long vigils brightly keep.
All thro' the heaven's span in flights
Lurk answering beams of tenderest ray,
That show me where the dawning day
Will steal the tresses of the night.
Far more in dreams than out, my flight
Of thought had massive tide of ebb and flow;
And all the hushed winds murmured low.
Then thro' my paradise of dreams

Sad ocean's sullen voice arose,
And shot to sense swift, darting gleams
That wakened me from my repose.
I heard the sweeping wind that blows
From cliff to cliff, and holds the spray
Against the sheer of stubborn walls,
And clips the shore along its way;
I heard it thro' the shrub that lolls
Close to the brink of precipice
Make moan, like death that often falls
Amid the lonely fisher-huts
That group upon the barren ruts,
Which all the waves of ocean kiss.
Once more it rang with strangest wail,
And round about my feet it sped;
(It seemed as voices of the dead,
That laughed and cried o'er some old tale).
And made my inmost blood turn pale.
I tried to smile away the fear,
But louder grew the cries and drear,
I felt myself a thing so frail.
Here on the coast I seemed a wreck;
A stranded, wind-swept, useless thing,

That had no place on earth to deck,
  Or hope to soothe my fluttering;
Yet even here there beamed a joy,
  Not born of sadness or of woe, —
  That I should breast the waves that flow,
And for the ocean be a toy.

A HULL.

YONDER lies the ship's gray hull,
Half lost in the sand that sifts from day to day
Through crevices innumerable. A solitary gull
Broods o'er it from aloft and looks for prey.

Twice, twixt dawn and dawn, the sea
Falls round it, and the sturdy rocks
Frown on the crumbling mass. Its old solidity
Is yielding to the successive shocks.

My soul is stranded on the shores of Love;
Old age frowns on it with a cold, blasé eye;
Unheeding things surge round the quiet cove
Wherein the crumbling hull doth lie.

Backward the dazed senses wing their flight,
And skim the surface of youth's sun-lit sea;
Life is now sunless, born of moons and night,
And dim reflections of a past maturity.

A FACE OF FORMER DAYS.

I COME and sit near this old bridge,
To hear the water gurgle by?
To watch that gem-like dragon-fly
Pass and repass o'er yonder ridge?

I come here often, morn and night;
Lean on my hand a thoughtful face;
To me this is a sacred place —
A view that rests my tired sight.

The moon from yonder hill is grand;
Thou wouldst not deem her in decay,
If, glancing out across the bay
You'd see her pathway on the strand.

From higher ground the starry view
Holds enwrapt the gazers' mind,
Enlarges thought, for there you'll find
A thousand worlds to blink at you.

These of themselves ought draw me here,
Yet I scarce notice all they tell;
My sight is blurred — I simply dwell
On scenes long past, yet seeming near.

Can you see leaning 'gainst yon rail
A childish form all clad in white?
No! to me she comes there every night,
A slender willow and as frail.

She always stands there: see! she smiles;
But I forgot, *you* cannot see;
Her little laughs are but for me
To cheer the moments of grief's wiles.

Thus, sir, do I seek this view
To see a face of former days;
Old men like me may have strange ways —
Perhaps, when older, you'll have them too.

You think it fancy? Well my friend,
I'll not dispute you — have your say;
But mind, sir: your prose can never sway, —
My life's a poem to the end.

ON SEEING A PICTURE BY J. APPLETON BROWN.

HOW deep in nature's lore must artists dip
To form such lights and shadows with a brush's tip!
Oh, lovely day, made grander by white clouds!
One almost *feels* the shadow as it shrouds
The virgin grass in splendid quiverings,
Or *hears* the flap of yon spread goose's wings
As slowly to the bath, stretch-necked,
He leads the flock. 'Way off, the distance, Carot-like, is decked
With stately elms whose cooling shade
Around the rough old butts has made
Havens of rest, where, from the day's bold eyes
To dream is to know heaven ere one dies.
O'er all pervades a sense of reverence;

The boy who leans upon the bridge's fence
  Seems loth to stir, and tranced, idles all thought
  Upon the water's face. A bit of blue is caught
And held as hostage at the pool's command.
The very grass bows down, as though the hand
  Of nature with a fond caress
  Pressed gently and with tenderness.

Deep in the shadow an old home stands, —
Save where a sunbeam slips its leafy bands
  And falls upon it with a splendid glow,
  Enriching fact and fancy by a single blow.
Pure doves rest on it, and with a gentle coo
Chime the sweet woodland through and through.
  Such is the picture; and I only ask,
  That oft may dear nature tempt the task, —
That oft may she lure such true interpreters
To deck a canvas with these smiles of her's

Pause, sweet Enchantress, in thy dreamy moods,
And have thy face, June-wreathed, greet multitudes;
  Let those who know thee least have chance to spy
  The tender longings in thy radiant eye;
And those who know thee best — ah! do they need
A pictured semblance to intercede?

REFLECTED LOVE.

THE soft impeachment of her down-cast eyes' sweet glance
Fell on my face like some unconscious ray
Of sunlight severed from the dying day,
As with head half turned she watched me. O, the trance
Which round her full lips' corners seemed to dance!
A smile suppressed, held checked, yet full of play,
As in a roguish puppy's eye when most at bay,
And watching every movement for a sudden chance!

My spirit knew thee, there, rolled the gross flesh back,
And thy heart's book its holy secret spake.
No mystic runes, — plain in its beaten track,
Love reflected love for its own sake.
There all thy nature melted without lack,
As snow within the bosom of a lava lake.

MY MORNING WALK.

O GLORIOUS God-gift, this sweet scented air!
How good upon this level stretch to stand,
And watch, low down upon the heaving strand,
The day's bright eye ope up with matchless care.
See! yon sail 's afire; crag and crested billow share
The morning wine from God's lavish hand,
That dips in beauty the ocean and the land,
And leaves upon the mind, long after, a crimson flare.

Who could grow weary drinking such as this,
Or feel that life is vain with such grand sights
Awaiting every morn the getting up?
What are to me my dreams of happiness
With all the soaring round on lofty heights,
When, at the earth's edge, such holiness I sup?

DRUSILLA. — A MEMORY.

WHERE flowers bloomed in dark retreat
Of perfumed wood, and young birds' cry
Did echo where they warbled sweet
And oft essayed their primary fly —
'Twas here Drusilla loved to walk,
Attuned to nature's inward tense,
Embellished with the wild wood's talk
In spicy fragrance for the sense.

In sacerdotal reverence
She held each roughly natured bough;
They wrought in her intelligence,
Still pressed her not to make a vow,
They opened wide their gems from yore
And tossed to her from crests all plumed
Till in her heart the elfish lore
Of half the forest lay entombed.

And simple flowers near a silent pool
Awoke deep longings in her child-like heart;
And oft she lingered on her way from school
To seek their beauty from her mates apart.
None could divine her distant, anxious looks,
Nor tell what made her love the dark wood's gloom,
Nor why a flower pleased her more than books,
With its bare color and its rank perfume.

Unknown to any save her eyes, where lay
Love's fitful passion fondly placed;
And sweetest pleasure of his dreamy stay,
Born of rich smiles and tender haste;
Shunned by the world, sequestered in the dark,
Breathing but dolorous airs of ground,
To her they were fairer than the songster lark,
Whose melodies the clouds surround.

She was all pliant to my every plea,
And put to shame the pink of wayside rose;
Nor felt the slightest wish to up and flee
When round her slender waist my arm would close.

Her nestled head oft warmed my wind-chilled
breast,
And like deep wells her eyes my image held,
And when against her own my lips I pressed
Our very blood seemed by some witchery spelled.

Close by a wood whose sombre sentinels ran
In serried columns up a hill's steep side,
And standing as firm as rock — a woodland clan,
Boasting their prestige to the winds' chill pride,
A little house all draped in climbing flowers,
Caught the first shadows of descending night,
As o'er the hill they came in quivering showers,
Fading the landscape by their gentle flight.

Here was her home; and here at morn and eve
Circled the mist across the valley's spread;
While from the tree-tops it was loth to leave,
But wrapped around each sun-warmed, sun-kissed
head.
From here, along the upland path, at break of day,
The huddling sheep like wind-pressed clouds did
go,

And straying behind, Drusilla, blithe alway,
Trailing her tresses on the wind's sharp flow.

Stole the shy deer from out their secret lair
To drink their mild eyes full of her;
Or up the gay lark high, high in the air
Smote the crisp day with sudden whir
And song pure as the spring whose music bubbling went
O'er pine-roots and o'er pebbles, then to plunge
Down some long precipice of steep descent,
And lay their trembling at its hasty lunge.

Oft the fleet winds as couriers bore her songs
Through the wood's aisles; while the clear strains
Woke to soft echo the feathered throngs
Which dwelt all happy in the nectared lanes.
Free was her soul from man's base touch,
For but the lips of nature to her spoke;
Unknown the city's guiles and all things such,
While passion slumbered till my love awoke.

Unknown those massive piles whose buzzing walls instil
Youth with middle life and middle life with age,

Till all the flesh seems but a crumpled frill,
And stamps life as a tattered, much-read page.
Only the twilight of strong limbed pines
Knew the glad music of her hurrying feet;
Only the wind that came from bosky shrines
Knew the low trillings of her songs complete.

I had been lost amid the cloud-touched hills,
Cheated in distance by some bird's song,
Lured from my path, beguiled by sweet-lipped rills,
Till, ere I guessed it, ranged the shadows long.
Low in the west the night-pushed daylight played,
Splendid in color, as the prism's flash gem-decked;
When from some hill's far crest there strayed
The music of a song as richly flecked.

Softly it floated, and, as a spider's bridge
That rises and falls upon each eddying breath,
Through the stilled air from ridge to ridge,
It came as gently as the flight of Death.
Quick did I seize! o'er paths bough-strewn I sped,
Hoping ere long to reach the welcome voice,

And from the darkening woods to be diswed,
And thank the singer with a deep rejoice.

Surely some power to me its swiftness lent!
And soon the distance behind me lay;
While all my senses were alert, and bent
I dodged the branches of the sylvan way.
Till suddenly before me, from out the shade
I saw her stepping like a robber bold,
And, ere I knew it, from my heart I paid
Love's highest cravings with affection's gold.

She came and by my side she stood,
In all the tender grace of unknown fear;
Oh how I worshipped her young womanhood,
Which never yet had nursed life's bitter tear.
Deep in my soul her budding graces lay,
While every word brought forth a perfumed wave,
Which came like ripples speeding o'er a bay,
Or echoes falling through an ocean cave.

Longingly I looked, unwilling to depart;
And dreaming gazed upon her face

Where lay the musings of a simple heart
As plainly as vein-lines could trace.
Her eyes' rare glance I still do see,
So childlike in their calm content;
And oft I seek immunity
From earth and men in wonderment.

She was my life, and when she passed away
Within the new-earthed grave two hearts were placed;
Two hearts beneath yon granite shaft still lay;
Above, in peace, two hands are traced.
Death cannot part, nor years make dim
The love which through our young blood sped;
And still through vistas strange we swim,
I of the living, she — of the dead.

AT LOVE'S BOARD.

ALAS! poor Love, that you and I should choose,
Our tender memories for reflection's food;
That, of all viands, these should first intrude,
To choke with bitter sobs the heart's recluse,

Alas! that all our former days should seek this use:
To bring old pleasures with their limbs all nude,
And make in Time a moment's interlude,
Where we might know it all, nor potent to refuse.

Thus 'round Love's board we sup our cup of fate,
And eat the wormy food that Time has made.
Thus do we sigh and dream. Alas! too late
To plant with roses where our hopes were laid,
For see! the hour has vanished, and tho' men prate,
Down the dim distance tramps the long parade.

MY INHERITANCE.

OFTEN, O God, I feel that some deep curse
Is my inheritance from some dim ancestry,
Who from thy ordained paths did stray,
And of thy precepts failed to act as nurse.
Teach me if wrong; and teach me to rehearse
Day after day thy blest commands, and pray.
Fill me with heaven's fire, that I may not delay,
But all thy blessings gladly, widely disburse.

Oft pride's cold ear is turned to me,
And, as an asp, her scornful lips reply.
Because my raiment breathes of poverty,
And does not meet the taste of fashion's eye,
Must all my life be buried 'neath the sea,
And crushed, unknown, a god-soul die?

THE KILLING OF THE ELK.

FAR to the West where dazzling waters
In the sunlight gleamed and played,
Hemmed by deepest forest shade,
By whose banks elk often strayed,
Came at even, sons and daughters
Of the Sioux, and near it stayed.

Late into the twilight staying,
Till the moon's pale lingering flame,
O'er the waters whence it came
Sprinkled on the tide its name;
With the waters ever playing
All night long it seemed the same.

While beneath the wild ash bending,
As the breeze swept o'er the lake,
And the moon still showed its wake,

As from out the dark cloud's break,
Softly still it came descending,
Where the leaves did whirl and shake,

Where upon the shore's soft gray sand,
Weaving deftly and with skill,
Laughing, chatting, weaving still,
Now with bright beads then with quill,
Sat the Sioux maids, ever fanned
By the breeze from o'er the hill.

All alone with work before her,
By a torn root in the shade,
Whose white arms had ever made
Squaw and pappoose half afraid,
Sat the handsome Indiora
Where the shadows leaped and played,

Calm-eyed, dark-eyed; rippling laughter
Stranger than the cuckoo's note
On the waters seemed to float
Often near though still remote;
And the wild birds all came after
One shrill call from out her throat.

Round about her beaded, lithe form,
Worked in patterns strangely queer,
Hung with beads and bits of deer,
Leaving all her bosom clear, —
Was her robelet snug and warm:
Sat she there all free from fear.

Indiora, Queen of Starlight,
Dusky maiden of the Sioux,
Sparkling as the morning dew,
All her nature grand and true;
Sat she thus into the far night,
Watching as the night winds blew.

On the water far across
In the distance gleaming bright
Dimly moving was a light
Looking star-like in the night.
On the water did it toss,
Rising, falling, in its flight.

Nearer came it gleaming brightly,
While the sound of dipping oar
Faintly to the ear came o'er,

From the dark lake's frothy floor;
Then came she a-tripping lightly
Down upon the moist sand shore.

While behind a cloud safe hidden,
Half offering with its rays a flout,
Lingering in a sullen pout,
Was the full moon peering out.
Then from out the gloom unbidden
Loomed a shadow clear and stout.

Standing etched against the dim light,
Like a spectre from the dead,
Tossing on the wild lake's bed
Where our ghosts can only tread,
Was the warrior Equeinwight,
Who from many wounds had bled.

'Long the shore with paddle flying
Came the mighty warrior bold,
Splashing high the waters cold, —
Waters by sea-nymphs controlled,
Till upon the shore espying
She whose hand he fain would hold;

Then turned he his rocking birch-bark,
Rocking with the surging deep,
On the sea caps would it leap,
Like some sea-genii 'twould keep
Rising, falling, in the dark,
Till it grated at her feet.

And they stood there on the lake's shore
Dimly outlined in the shade,
Where the torn root often made
Hideous shapes which danced and played;
Where the leaves did fall before
Winds which through the branches strayed.

Till the maiden whispered kindly,
Dropping voice to tender awe:
"Hast to-day the White Elk saw,
Hast thou followed close the law
That the Father taught not blindly,
Hast thou followed with no flaw?"

"Equeinwight has a brave's heart, —
Richer pelts hath crossed his track;
Slower beasts would fill his sack,

But to them he turned his back;
Straight and flawless passed his part,
Nor pausèd he his thirst to slack.

"On the morrow and the morrow,
Every day I'll seek again,
Through the timber, on the plain,
Till the ghost-like elk is slain;
And the wind shall bear our sorrow,
And the moaning waves our pain.

"Each night will we fill the quiver,
And when dawn breaks I will go
Forth into its budding glow,
Forth to hear the new winds blow;
And I'll scan all things that shiver
In the pathway of its flow.

"Ah, my poor one, we have waited,
Seen each cloudless day by sail,
Heard the low-toned winds make sigh
As they moved afar and nigh,
And, O Father, it seems fated
That thy children's hope must die.

"For each day has Equeinwight
Sought to pierce the pale elk's breast;
And he's neither asked for rest
Nor for help to gain his quest;
While in perfect faith each night
Has the eagle sought his nest.

"But thou knowest, O Great Spirit!
That slow Time can never stay;
That all moments fade away
As the snows on each new May.
And my soul begins to fear it
Will not know its perfect day."

Spoke he thus, the chieftain's son,
To the maiden at his side,
To his promised future bride,
To the maid who held his pride;
Yet before the prize he won
Must the White Elk yield his hide.

. . . . . .

Travellers tell that when the winds blow
Fierce from out the depths unknown,
That on every breath is blown
First a loud shout, then a groan;
Then they die away and grow
Like an echoing bugle's tone.

Still the sunlight clasps the waters,
From the banks elk sometimes drink,
From the torn root lovers shrink;
Still the ash bends o'er the brink,
And, at even, sons and daughters
Weave strange garments link by link.

Sometimes voices as in illness
On the moist sand shore are heard,
Cries as of an injured bird;
And light footsteps oft have stirred
Leaves and grasses in the stillness
Where young Love would breathe a word.

HOLY KISSES.

ONLY the night befriends,
Only the cool winds of day's shadow
Eases the toil-stained brow.
Sweet, then, is the twilight!
A moment it struggles upon the panes
Then passeth away.
Here in the house on the hill,
Where elms gently tap at the window, asking admittance,
I sit, and listen to all of night's voices.
Far down the silent street a footstep is coming,
And farther still, and fainter, soundeth the bell of the ferry.

Here from the rush of the day
A haven is found from its heat, — here all is quiet.
Past is all strife, till the morrow

Cometh with glare and with dazzle ;
Past from me the world and its mighty contortions ;
Past away all save recollection,
For deep in my heart the sweetness of dreamland is brilliant.

Yet only the winds have whispered,
Only the scents of June
Steal through the tightly drawn curtains,
Only the babble of peaceful existence is strident without.

Now the breath of the elm is melted and softened,
And o'er me is wafted the pine's and the hemlock's aroma.
There, in the shadow before me,
With eyes warmed to holy compassion,
Resteth the form of a loved one.
Tears blindeth the vision so grateful,
Inward a flood rolleth downward,
While afar, in a world invisible
Burneth brightly the hope of a meeting
When Death shall have severed all earth-ties.
Yet only a memory is present,

Which the eye of the mind perceiveth;
Only the breath of the forest
Hath conjured from out of its bosom,
An hour of childhood, a moment of pleasure;
While soft on my lips and sweet
Fall the kisses of Mother.

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R6T5

Rice, Will Amos
Through broken reeds

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